

Congress Must Refocus Bureau of Reclamation's Priorities Back to its Core Mission

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Bureau of Reclamation projects in the West have added greatly to the economic and social well being of entire communities, western states, and the nation over the past century. These important federally developed and owned projects continue to provide many benefits to the region, but have aged to the point that, in many cases, expensive major rehabilitation will be necessary in the near future. Yet, over the past several years, Reclamation's budget requests and Congressional appropriation levels for operation, maintenance and rehabilitation of these aging facilities has remained generally flat.

In contrast, budgets and appropriations have risen for Reclamation's environmental restoration and mitigation activities and for construction of rural domestic water supply projects and urban wastewater re-use projects. The benefits of these activities and projects are recognizable. However, they should not be pursued at the expense of Reclamation's core mission. Protecting the national investment in the *existing* Western water supply infrastructure requires significantly more resources than are being devoted to that purpose now.

The Obama Administration's proposed budget for Reclamation includes \$423.7 million, slightly more than the FY 2010 level, to fund Operations, Maintenance & Rehabilitation (OM&R) activities at Reclamation facilities, including dam safety. These programs are essential to Reclamation's core mission. Yet funding for OM&R has remained virtually the same for several years, and the current levels will not meet the rehabilitation and extraordinary maintenance needs of an aging federal infrastructure.

I respect Reclamation's responsibility to focus on the protection and restoration of the aquatic and riparian environments affected by its operations. I understand the obligation to fulfill the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Some of Reclamation's environmental restoration and mitigation activities are essential components of agreements and programs intended to ensure greater water supply reliability for irrigators.

However, approximately one-quarter of Reclamation's new budget request is dedicated to the newly-coined "Restoring Rivers" program. The Department of Interior and Reclamation in particular are among the very few federal entities that have a direct relationship with and understand the importance of Western irrigated agriculture. Numerous other federal agencies with significant funding from Congress are already focusing on environmental restoration activities. Many of these endeavors, while commendable, are not part of Reclamation's central mission and they should be funded from the budgets of federal fishery and wildlife agencies.

Reclamation has a role to play in supporting environmental / ecosystem restoration efforts intended to make Western U.S. rivers, streams and estuaries healthy. However, these restoration efforts should be focused to have direct water supply benefits for Reclamation project water users. There are numerous other government agencies tasked with clear directives and

adequately funded to steward environmental restoration efforts and fund urban water conservation projects. At the same time, there are very few programs that provide funding to support extraordinary maintenance and modernization of aging agricultural water infrastructure.

The latest Reclamation budget proposal emphasizes environmental restoration projects and new urban, tribal and rural domestic water programs. Congress must refocus Reclamation's priorities back to its core mission through the appropriations process.